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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001237

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STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, INR/B; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMESE REGIME OUSTS FOREIGN AFFAIRS TEAM

REF: A. RANGOON 250

[B](#). 03 RANGOON 1029

[C](#). 03 RANGOON 1031

Classified By: DCM Ron McMullen for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#). (C) Summary: On September 18, the SPDC conducted a mini-shuffle of the GOB cabinet, in the process ousting the regime's primary foreign affairs team and giving a boost to the trusted Minister of Labor, U Tin Winn. Gone to pasture are the unimpressive Minister of Foreign Affairs, U Win Aung, and his capable deputy, Khin Maung Win--replaced by senior military officers with little or no international and diplomatic experience. These latest cabinet changes are further indication that the Burmese regime is increasingly secure in its 16-year tenure. End Summary.

[2](#). (U) In a series of eight orders issued on September 18 by Secretary-1 Lt Gen Soe Win, the State Peace and Development

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Council (SPDC) made several significant changes to the Burmese government's cabinet, including the ouster of the Foreign Minister and his principal deputy as well as the Ministers of Agriculture and Transportation. The SPDC also shuffled three members of the GOB cabinet to new portfolios. (Note: September 18 was also the 16th anniversary of the seizure of power by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), predecessor to the SPDC. End Note.)

[3](#). (U) Begin text of cabinet changes:

"Permission granted for retirement:"

--U Win Aung, Minister for Foreign Affairs.
--U Khin Maung Win, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs.
--Maj-Gen Nyunt Tin, Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation.
--Maj-Gen Hla Myint Swe, Minister for Transport.

New appointments:

--Maj-Gen Nyan Win, Minister for Foreign Affairs.
--Col Maung Myint, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs.
--Col Zaw Min, Minister for Cooperatives.
--Brig-Gen Tin Naing Thein, Minister for Commerce.

Reassignments:

--Maj-Gen Htay Oo, Minister for Cooperatives to Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation.
--Maj-Gen Thein Swe, Minister at the Prime Minister's Office to Minister for Transport.
--Brig-Gen Pyi Sone, Minister for Commerce to Minister at the Prime Minister's Office.
--U Tin Winn, Minister for Labor and now concurrently Minister at the Prime Minister's Office.
(Comment: The new portfolio gives added responsibility to Tin Winn, one of the regime's most trusted cabinet members, who will replace the outgoing Minister of Foreign Affairs as head of the GOB's UNGA delegation. End Comment.)

End text of cabinet changes.

[4](#). (U) Biographic notes: New Foreign Minister Maj-Gen Nyan Win, a career soldier with no known international experience, was until his latest appointment the Deputy Director General of Military Training at the Ministry of Defense. The MFA has yet to release an official biography, but we understand that he previously served as commander of the Southeast Military Command (1999-2000); director of the military's Staff College (2000-2002); and as a senior member of the former Office of Strategic Studies (2002). He is also an active member of the National Convention's Convening Commission, which has oversight of the ongoing constitutional convention.

[5](#). (SBU) Bio notes continued: Very little is known about the new Deputy Foreign Minister, Col. Maung Myint, current commander of a light infantry division based in Rangoon who is apparently a well-regarded military officer but speaks little English and has no diplomatic experience. The new Minister for Cooperatives, Col Zaw Min, is the former Chairman of the Magwe Division Peace and Development Council, and the new Minister of Commerce, Brig-Gen Tin Naing Thein,

is the former Deputy Minister for Forestry. The outgoing Ministers of Agriculture (Maj-Gen Nyunt Tin) and Transport (Maj-Gen Hla Myint Swe) have reportedly been slated for retirement since 2003. End bio notes.

16. (C) Many Burmese, accustomed to the SPDC's quasi-annual cabinet reshuffling (refs), have greeted the changes with a resigned shrug of indifference. However, the abrupt departure of the GOB's primary foreign affairs team is noteworthy for its timing as well as for its substance. Beginning this week, Burma goes on the defensive and faces an intense period of interaction with the international community, including the UNGA and an annual Burma resolution; the October Asia-Europe Meeting Summit (ASEM) and related diplomatic drama over Burma's participation; and the November ILO Governing Board and possible countermeasures targeting the military regime.

17. (C) The appointment six years ago of outgoing Foreign Minister U Win Aung, a former military intelligence officer and Ambassador to the U.K., was perceived as an effort by the SPDC to use a capable diplomat to pitch the regime's bankrupt policies to the international community. However, the 60 year-old Win Aung has in many respects disappointed both the regime and the Rangoon diplomatic corps. Lacking the full confidence of the generals, he has had scant decision-making authority and has frequently been uninformed about SPDC policies. In private, he has expressed a desire to retire and spend time in a Buddhist monastery. The "retirement" of his deputy, Khin Maung Win, marks the departure of a more seasoned and sophisticated career diplomat (a 1983 Fulbright scholar and graduate of The Johns Hopkins University).

18. (C) Comment: Following the weekend cabinet changes, there has been standard speculation in Rangoon that the appointments and departures reflect a power play among the regime's troika of Chairman Than Shwe, Vice Chairman Maung Aye, and Prime Minister Khin Nyunt--with the Chairman calling the shots and further consolidating his power. However, we find it more interesting to observe that the abrupt ouster of the GOB's foreign affairs team, replaced by active military officers with no known diplomatic experience, is further indication that the Burmese regime is increasingly secure in its 16-year quest for legitimacy. With these latest appointments, the vast majority of the cabinet is now comprised of active or former military officers (only the Ministers of Education, Health, and National Planning are "full" civilians). End Comment.
Martinez